

Employer Branding – in Saudi Arabia

The international momentum building around the importance of a strong Employer Brand is such, that it is rapidly becoming a Top 5 strategic initiative across global Enterprises and local SMEs. As with all strategies, what works in one country, rarely works as a template for all other countries. When you take a strategy focused on cultural aspects, it is even more important to recognize what can and can't work locally.

In Saudi, hierarchy is a very important and desired aspect within the established Enterprises, with many (not all) leadership being Machiavellian in style and approach. However, as with all economies, there is variance, especially in Saudi's burgeoning SME sector where innovation and creativity can be truly world class. If you cannot understand and embrace the local preferences/customs, then you cannot successfully enhance the corporate culture.

Misconception of Employer Branding

Employer Branding is not a Communications initiative; rather it is the first opportunity for Communications, Marketing and HR to forge a long-lasting strategic collaboration. In order to make Employer Branding effective, there must be a resolute cooperation between HR, Communications and Marketing. The evolution of Employer Branding will lead to a changing structure in the organization; one that will bring creativity and new motivational factors; not challenges of concern but of desire. The 'real' Employer Brand is in the hands of the HR leader.

The 'People' experience

The experience that people related to your company have:

- Candidate experience
How long did the interview process take? Was the Job Analysis clear? Did they get feedback whether they were rejected or not? Did they feel they were asked relevant questions by a competent interviewer? Did they get a clear and consistent understanding of what the Employee Value Proposition is?
- Employee experience
Do people understand what their role is in the organization? Do they know where they can be in 3 years? Are they being accurately appraised? Are they being fairly treated? Do they feel their employer values them?
- Ex-employee experience
Why did they leave? Does the company keep in touch with them? What do they think of the company? Would they consider joining again? Would they recommend them as a good employer?

There are other questions to ask of course, but the point is whether they are being asked and taken seriously. Real Executive Search Firms can bring the value to the Candidate experience, but the HR and Leadership teams need to take account of the Employee and Ex-employee experiences.

In Saudi Arabia, the preference is to trust the opinion of someone they know. If that person has had, or is having, a bad experience with a company, then what happens to the Employer Brand?... exactly! It starts to diminish.

So let's see the positives here. HR leaders need to take on these crucial questions in regards to the 'People experience' and develop realistic development plans with a 3-year timeframe, just like any other key strategic change. Employer Branding is not a HR tool, it is a company's philosophy and therefore requires a shift in mentality throughout the organization, which will take time.

Mentality shift

Just like the image of a company changes when they want to appear to be 'greener' and environmentally friendly, the same purposeful change to everything the company touches must be made in embracing Employer Branding.

HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You are jointly responsible for getting the most out of the company's most important Asset: it's people• Need to shift from information-centric to a people-centric view of HR, focused on how the work gets done, not who does what across the company• Must look at identifying, connecting, communicating and acquiring candidates in much the same way Marketing does with customers
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognition that Employer Branding is a dual leadership responsibility between you and HR• Work with HR/Recruitment to build and manage web 2.0 communities, connect with relevant targets and communicate value
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Look to implement the Employee Value Proposition and Employer Branding principles into everything you do• Share knowledge with HR/recruitment on how to build customer (candidate) segmentation and content development
All managers / leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "This is how we do things around here" NOT "This is something HR is doing"• Embrace and open your mind to how improvement needs to be made by you, and from you.• Refresh your view on how your division serves the company• Without your people, goals cannot be achieved

Monitoring the success of Employer Branding should not be on cost per hire alone, the benefits are much more than simply reducing costs.

In Saudi, most business owners and CEOs don't want to hear the negatives from the 'People' experience, but this is changing. Today we see Leaders who are not afraid to hear the inconvenient truths, because they know it will bring sustainability and performance.

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About the author:



Ewan Walton is a Client Partner at Pedersen & Partners based in Dubai. Mr. Walton has over 13 years' experience in Executive Search and Recruitment Advisory in the EMEA region with a special focus on Saudi Arabia and the GCC. Before joining Pedersen & Partners, he was a Partner and the Managing Director at KPMG leading their Executive Search Practice. Prior to that, Mr. Walton co-founded in 2001 one of the first Executive Search firms in the GCC region, which grew to be the largest in the region at the point of its acquisition in 2006. He is highly experienced in Family Business, ICT, Real Estate Development & Construction, Financial Markets and Retail sectors, helping his clients hire senior Directors from Board level to CxO, as well as CxO direct reports and Advisors.

In addition to his native English, Mr. Walton can read Arabic and has basic skills in spoken Arabic.
